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We appreciate the opportunity to submit these comments regarding the 2002 Farm Bill provision that the Department of Agriculture "shall not prohibit the use of any technology to improve food safety that has been approved by the Secretary of Agriculture or has been approved or is otherwise allowed by the Secretary of Health and Human Services" for use in various commodity purchase programs.

In passing this legislation, Congress demonstrated its commitment to allowing proven food safety technologies to be implemented in the USDA Commodity Purchase Program. Irradiation of food products has a long and successful history, supported by mountains of research proving its efficacy and safety. The world's leading health authorities endorse food irradiation. For this reason, irradiated foods should be an option for school districts and other customers of the AMS Commodity Purchase Program, just as it is for millions of consumers every day across the United States in over 4,000 supermarkets and several hundred restaurants.

The irradiation of ground beef can be a valuable mechanism for further reducing the likelihood of school children being exposed to pathogens in their food. While the meat industry continues to develop new technologies and processes to reduce the incidence of pathogens, irradiation can serve as an important safety net to help protect consumers.

We urge the rapid development by AMS of the rules and specifications that would allow irradiated meats to be purchased through its programs.

Respectfully submitted,

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Executive Director

REPRESENTING THE MEAT INDUSTRY IN THE SOUTHWEST

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